



It might come **IN HANDY'**

Fiona Gibson has just one problem with decluttering – her husband

The decorations are down. Our three adult kids have headed back to their own homes and it's just me and Jimmy, in a flat that feels eerily quiet. Some people find this time of year a bit dismal. But to me it's brilliant. It represents a fresh new

start – and after the festive madness, I'm keen to make our home an oasis of calm.

This means a huge and ruthless declutter. Finally, our home will be smooth-running and sleek, and everything in it will be either useful or loved (or – ideally – both). I know

that I'll meet with opposition as my husband is of the 'we might need that one day' mindset. My hope is that if I tear into the task with enough gusto, then he won't notice what's going on. I simply can't face a lengthy debate on why that tacky picture of the Arc de Triomphe is charity shop

bound – and why we don't need five thermos flasks.

I start with what I once termed, optimistically, our linen cupboard – a hideous cave crammed with ugly paintings and bags of ancient paperwork and curios picked up in French flea markets when our twin boys were toddlers (they are now 26). 'I'd like to keep that,' Jimmy says, when I try to dispose of a tiny cupboard made of curly wire and matted with dust. We bought it at the turn of the millennium thinking it looked 'very French'. We've never put it up anywhere, yet now he grabs it off me, whisking it away to his study with an accusatory backwards glance.

At least, when I move on to 'neutral' stuff, there's no interference. Even Jimmy can't argue that we need six duvets when we haven't hosted a sleepover since Labour were in government. We also own enough pillows to stock a hotel, some so lumpy I wouldn't expect a dog to sleep on them – so off they go to the tip.

Our camping equipment is more contentious. We have two tents, a collapsible table, four folding chairs, and numerous camping beds and roll-out mats. Our walk-in cupboard is basically a tiny branch of Mountain Warehouse and everything must go.

I should add that years ago, I announced to Jimmy that I never want to sleep under canvas again, as our final camping 'holiday' had nearly broken my back. 'Neither do I,' he admitted. Yet now he's saying, 'I'd be up for trying it again' – as if, like disposing of those too-tight jeans, getting rid of stuff is too final. 'We just need the right gear,' he reasons. What – buy more tents and camping mats? I'm wondering now if he's planning to exchange me for a different wife – one who'll happily trek to the dank toilet block in the middle of the night. (Also – why are two tents needed? In case we fall out and opt for separate sleeping arrangements?)

As things become heated, I realise how ridiculous humans can be. Because no other species would acquire things

and not use them for decades, yet insist on hanging on to them. Take our cookware – another category needing urgent attention.

Not even the Von Trapp family could utilise as many oven dishes as we have. Jimmy, who loves a charity shop browse, keeps bringing more home, saying they'll be 'good for Christmas'. Ovenware is like husbands, I reason. I only need one decent, hard-wearing model that fulfils all purposes – and I have my beloved Le Creuset casserole, given to me by my mum when I left home in 1982.

Introducing new cooking pots makes life messy and complicated. How can I stop this happening? You can't prevent an adult from buying things. You can throw things out, secretly, hiding them under piles of old jumpers as you head

out to the charity shop. But it triggers intense guilt – like when I hid my daughter's favourite picture book as I couldn't face reading it one more time. That's how bad it feels – like stuffing *Room on the Broom* behind a radiator. As if I'm stealing from Jimmy – because who am I to determine what's

clutter and what's not?

Hang on a minute! We're not talking his grandad's war medals, but rubbishy books clogging up our shelves. We think owning a 'library' makes us look brainy, but look closer and you'll find joke books, football annuals and car maintenance manuals from the era when you might actually be able to make a fan belt from a pair of tights. Can't I get rid of those? And what about that horrible stool with a padded seat that Jimmy found in the street? Nasty ugly thing I have a personal vendetta against – because one of our sons tumbled off it and cracked his head.

'Please,' I beg, 'can't we take that to the tip?'

For a moment he looks reasonable. He's wavering, I think – and if I can get him to agree to the stool, we can move on to cookware and camping stuff. And then there'll be no stopping me.

He looks down at the ugliest stool ever made – that maimed our son – and he says, 'It might come in handy, that.'

'Our walk-in cupboard is basically a tiny branch of Mountain Warehouse'

HOARDER VS MINIMALIST

Don't see eye to eye with your partner about decluttering? Lisa Coe, professional home organiser and founder of Happy Space Organised, is here to help.

1 TALK TO YOUR PARTNER Let them know the impact that living in a cluttered home is having on you and share with them the wider benefits that you feel decluttering will bring. This may be less time cleaning and tidying, reduced stress or more time to do the things you enjoy. Keep things positive and avoid criticism – your aim is to get them on board.

2 LEAD BY EXAMPLE Begin with your own belongings. Many of my clients' partners start off relatively indifferent to the service I offer, but become big converts once they've seen the results and the huge difference it makes to their partner's wellbeing.

3 BE COMPASSIONATE It can be hard to part with belongings. Start with little and often, and begin with items that don't hold any sentimental value. Decluttering gets easier with practice.

4 OFFER HANDS-ON HELP You may find your partner isn't motivated to declutter, but is happy for you to hold things up while they tell you what they'd like to keep and what they don't need. This is an approach I often use with my husband.

5 ACCEPT THAT A DEGREE OF COMPROMISE WILL BE REQUIRED What appears to be clutter to you may be valuable to them. As tempting as it may be, don't declutter your partner's belongings without their permission, as it's likely to lead to more resistance.

✦ Lisa Coe is based in the Midlands. To find out more, visit happyspaceorganisedbylisa.co.uk or follow her on Instagram @happyspaceorganisedbylisa

✦ Fiona's latest novel, *The Man I Met on Holiday* (£8.99, PB, Avon), is out now.